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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

REMOVING RACIAL BARRIERS

CHARLESTON, IL.--The American public is divided over whether a person's race makes it harder to pursue and obtain a college degree, according to a new national poll released recently by the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) and conducted by The Gallup Organization as part of National Higher Education Week, Oct. 8-14.

While many of those surveyed believe race makes no difference in gaining accessibility to a college education, an equal number believe a person's race makes it harder to gain accessibility.

The two most important ways colleges and universities can increase accessibility for students of all races, according to the majority of the 1,253 respondents age 18 and older, are 1) to work more closely with parent, community, and church groups and 2) to develop programs with elementary and secondary schools.

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At Eastern Illinois University, increased accessibility for minority students is being made possible through a cooperative school-college partnership between the University and Chicago's Percy Julian High School to enhance educational opportunities for minority students.

The five-week program is designed to acquaint the high school students with Eastern and promote education beyond high school. It also gives participants the opportunity to earn eight college credits.

This summer, the Percy Julian program was expanded to include a two-week program for ninth graders entering Percy Julian in the fall.

Eastern has also made progress in the percentage of minority and international students enrolled at the University this fall. The percentage of minority students at Eastern increased from 5.9 percent in 1988 to 6.2 percent in 1989, while the number of international students increased from 78 last year to 94 this fall.

According to the poll, significantly fewer respondents said other suggestions--such as hiring minority faculty who can serve as role models, or offering minority scholarships and other forms of financial aid--are "extremely important" in increasing minority participation.

At the same time, white and non-white respondents differ somewhat as to which specific ways they consider extremely important for increasing accessibility to college. For instance, the item that attracts the greatest support among whites is working with parent, community, and church groups, with 58 percent saying "extremely important." Instead, non-whites most frequently name colleges and universities working with elementary and secondary school programs as extremely important (81 percent).

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National Higher Education Week is an annual event hundreds of campuses around the country are observing. This year's theme is "Higher Education: Be a Part of It," and stresses the participation of all American citizens in higher education.

CASE is the nation's largest education association in terms of institutional membership, with approximately 2,850 colleges, universities, and independent secondary and elementary schools as members. CASE's mission is to advance public understanding and support of education for the benefit of society.